



MICHIGAN CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

YOUR LAND, YOUR WATER, YOUR MICHIGAN

To: Michigan House of Representatives Natural Resources, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation Committee

From: Kelly Goward, Vice President, Michigan Conservation District Critical Dune Partnership

Re: House Bill 5647

I am submitting this testimony both as an individual employee of a Michigan Conservation District and also as the Vice President of the Michigan Conservation District Critical Dune Partnership, which represents Conservation Districts from all 19 counties that have critical dune areas within their boundaries. We are in opposition of House Bill 5647, specifically as it relates to eliminating Conservation Districts from the critical dune process.

Our concern specifically pertains to Section 35313(1)(c) and the removal of Conservation Districts in providing landowners with vegetation removal assurances. We propose leaving the role of Conservation Districts in place. Conservation Districts, through one-on-one interaction, provide best management practice information to help protect landowners' vested interests in their property. We provide specific vegetation management guidelines and recommendations to landowners, builders, contractors, and consultants so that ultimately, the landowner is provided with enough information to make informed decisions about managing vegetation within a challenging environment. Local assistance is essential to the success of any land management or protection program and Conservation Districts, who provide natural resource information, education and technical assistance to Michigan's private landowners, are best suited for this role.

Our second concern with this section of the law is a reference to a forest management document, "forestry management guidelines for Michigan", which in and of itself is an excellent resource for forest management, but not appropriate for use in providing guidance to landowners as they develop in critical dune areas. This document does not provide any information specific to the dunes ecosystem. Currently, there is not a single reference document available that addresses this environment, which is why we suggest the inclusion of Conservation Districts as a local information resource to provide landowners with this level of information and assistance. The Conservation Districts that make up the Critical Dunes

Partnership are very willing to work together to create new guidance documents that will be of assistance to the landowner, while acknowledging the special ecosystem in which they live.

In closing, we understand the desire to roll back aspects of the program that infringe on the property rights of private landowners and we acknowledge the rights of our private landowners. We also understand the special nature of our critical dunes and want to continue providing our private landowners with information and assistance so that they can make sound decisions on how to develop their property while protecting this fragile ecosystem. Michigan Conservation Districts have a long history of successfully delivering local conservation programs to local landowners and we encourage you to include Conservation Districts in Section 35313(1)(c) so that Conservation Districts may continue to provide vegetation removal assurance assistance to those working and living within Michigan's critical dunes well into the future.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Kelly Goward". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kelly" and last name "Goward" clearly legible.

Kelly Goward

Michigan Conservation District Critical Dune Partnership